

SECOG Open Space Plan: 2024 Year End Review and Next Steps

In October 2024, the SECOG Board formally adopted the 2024 SECOG Regional Open Space Plan. The Plan contains 15 Regional Action Items for SECOG staff to pursue in the coming years in support of conservation in the region’s open space network and both passive and active recreation opportunities for the region’s residents. The plan contained a preliminary seven-year work plan for these action items. Each year, we report on the progress made with each action item, and suggest any edits to the intended work program for upcoming years. Below is the report for progress made in 2024. Color coding assists in drawing attention to where efforts advanced stated goals (green) and where there were unanticipated barriers to implementation, or changes in priorities relative to the action item (pink).

Recommended Action Item Implementation Matrix: Regional Projects

Rec ID	Rec Keywords Summary	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
R1	Open Space Access Analysis Methodology	Data collection			Data maintenance			
2024	SECOG staff set up a data collection framework for access point field verification and inventory and held the first season of data collection in summer 2024. With the addition of new staff members, SECOG was able to accomplish data collection (using ArcGIS Online Field Maps) in the six municipalities: Colchester, Bozrah, Lisbon, Sprague, New London, and Stonington (inclusive of the Boro). SECOG staff adjusted the field procedure after initial outings. With additional staff, we can likely keep up the pace of six municipalities per field season and accomplish the full regional access point inventory in 2026, a year ahead of schedule.							
R2	Integrated Open Space and Transportation Planning	Continuous sharing and co-development of data						
2024	SECOG staff continue to find opportunities to align open space and transportation planning. Across the agency, we are revamping the ways we integrate plan recommendations into databases that can be cross-referenced. For example, SECOG’s hazard mitigation plan recommendations are being tabularized and digitized. We anticipate taking similar action with our open space and transportation plans, which will allow for additional integration. Transportation staff assisted in the development of the R1 open space access analysis methodology. We have likely found a first test-case in how this data can be used to highlight open space access issues across transportation networks (pedestrian networks; public transit) through the Town of Colchester’s Open Space Plan update. As of December 2024, SECOG and Town staff are in conversation about this possibility.							
R3	Regionally Significant Multi-Use Paths and Trails	Project development	Planning and implementation grant writing /admin assistance					
2024	SECOG staff did not make progress with this action item in 2024. However, SECOG anticipates taking the first steps toward project development in early 2025 through a GIS analysis aimed at understanding the parcels that would connect major MUPs.							
R4	Watershed-based Recreational Waters Access Plans	Prioritize watersheds	Plan 1	Plan 2	Plan 3	Plan 4		
2024	SECOG staff did not make progress with this action item because it is not currently a priority for local municipalities and watershed groups, the latter of which are presently more focused on							

Rec ID	Rec Keywords Summary	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2024	2030
	water quality concerns than increasing recreational access points. SECOG will continue to raise the possibility of this work with municipalities and watershed groups in the years to come. Once the full open space access field work and database are complete, SECOG can analyze the locations that allow for water access as a next step and planning tool.							
R5	Define Development Supportive and Prime Receiving Areas	Literature and data source review		POCD development		Pursue development supportive projects		
2024	SECOG staff initiated the literature review as planned, analyzing current local POCDs for areas that are prioritized for development. SECOG staff will continue this analysis, as it is also helpful for the POCD process kicking off in February 2025, and port the literature review into a GIS layer and framework for additional analysis and presentation.							
R6	Regional Watershed Planning Technical Assistance	WBP reviews and relationship building		Technical assistance				
2024	SECOG staff made progress in establishing relationships with watershed groups in the region, with a division of labor between staff members for attending specific watershed organization meetings on a regular periodic basis. SECOG started a watershed white paper to understand the landscape of watershed groups, their specific priority needs, and known waterbody impairments throughout the region. The white paper will be completed on schedule by end of year 2025 and will include a review of existing watershed-based plans, and an impaired waterbodies GIS database and planning tool.							
R7	Regional Dam Removal Prioritization	Engagement with watershed orgs		Dam removal technical assistance				
2024	SECOG staff initiated regional dam removal prioritization, but not through engagement with watershed organizations, as expected. Rather, staff engaged with FEMA and the CT Office of Dam safety around the possibility of adding a High Hazard Dam Potential amendment to the SECOG HMCAP. In 2025, SECOG will continue to evaluate this possibility.							
R8	Regional Stormwater Collaborative	Establish the Collaborative		Continue the Collaborative and provide MS4 compliance assistance				
2024	SECOG staff made limited but important initial progress with this action item. SECOG did not convene a meeting, but rather focused on increasing staff knowledge of the MS4 process and stormwater resources in December 2024, along with developing a game plan for gauging municipal interest in early 2025. We are still on track to establish the collaborative by end of year 2025.							
R9	Regional Low Impact Development Regulation Audit	Engage with NEMO around existing LID audit frameworks		LID Audits	LID regulation models and best practice assistance			
2024	SECOG staff made initial progress with this action item. In the process of contacting NEMO to learn about their previous LID study methodology, we have learned that while NEMO resources are still posted online, there is no longer an ongoing technical assistance relationship between DEEP and NEMO. Consequently, we shifted our approach and outreach to NVCOG, which previously accomplished a LID bylaw review for the municipalities in their region. We learned about their approach and methodology. That research is contained in SECOG's SharePoint under projects – resiliency...-stormwater. While we still see the value in completing a regional bylaw review, we will verify that this is a local priority with members of the Regional							

Rec ID	Rec Keywords Summary	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2024	2030
	Stormwater Collaborative once it is convened. Pending input from the Regional Stormwater Collaborative, it is conceivable that we would develop a partnership-based grant application for completing regional LID bylaw review in 2025–2026.							
R10	Regional Food Action Planning	Engage with partners and determine regional need			Participate in plan process, if actualized			
2024	SECOG staff made progress in connecting with organizations that are involved in agricultural advocacy and local food security through the development of the Open Space Plan. We will look for opportunities to document related needs and the value of the agricultural sector in Southeastern Connecticut as part of the 2027 POCD.							
R11	Regional Heat Action Planning	Existing Conditions built from HMP		Engage with partners to collect heat data and develop mitigation grants				
2024	SECOG made significant progress with this action item in 2024. Staff, alongside eight local municipal and non-profit collaborating entities, submitted a \$20M EPA Community Change Grant application to collect heat data and advance heat mitigation action items in the communities of Colchester, Windham, East Lyme, New London, Groton, and the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation. In the process of developing the grant, SECOG staff documented existing conditions related to heat risk and vulnerability. SECOG staff are currently collating existing conditions information into a heat vulnerability and project development StoryMap, which will be released in early 2025.							
R12	Open Space Related Flood Hazard Mitigation Projects	Identify flood mitigation open space projects		Yantic River Pilot tech. assistance		Additional technical assistance		
2024	SECOG staff evaluated flood mitigation strategies with an open space acquisition component in the HMCAP. However, there are few such recommendations in the plan. Instead, SECOG staff focused on the Yantic River flood mitigation Resilient CT 3.0 project, and laid the ground work for the intended 2026-2027 work program in which SECOG staff will carry forward the resulting projects into implementation phases, especially in the upper watershed areas of Bozrah and Franklin, where flood mitigation through open space acquisition and floodplain reconnection is a target project.							
R13	SECOG Open Space Dashboard Maintenance	Pilot annual data collection		Mini-retreat check-in		Maintain data for 2034 OSP Update		
2024	SECOG did not meet internally to develop a process for reaching out to municipalities and open space stakeholders on an annual basis to update the database. This will be a priority in early 2025 to ensure that we have updated data from 2024. We will have a process in place by the deadline of the pilot collection period at end of year 2025.							
R14	Data Collection Projects	Vernal pools data research		ADA access data and research		Other data needs		
2024	SECOG did not pursue vernal pools data research in 2024 but will do so in 2025 to meet this interim action item deadline.							
R15	Open Space Grants Database	Database enrichment		Database maintenance				
2024	SECOG did not make progress in developing an open space specific grants database or in verifying that the current agency-wide grant database includes all known open space grants. We will do so in 2025 to meet this interim action item deadline.							

In addition to regional action items, the plan contains municipal annexes with specific local recommendations of regionwide significance. SECOG staff also plan to assist in the implementation of these action items. As in the previous section, below is the report for progress made in 2024. Color coding assists in drawing attention to where efforts advanced stated goals (green) and where there were unanticipated barriers to implementation, or changes in priorities relative to the action item (pink). For some actions, SECOG did not plan to advance implementation in 2024 (yellow). Overall, SECOG accomplished fewer local technical assistance outcomes in 2024 than regional action items.

Recommended Action Item Implementation Matrix, continued

Group ID	Rec Keyword Summary & Municipal Rec IDs	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
L1	Car-top watercraft access points and portage: BZ1, CL2, GR-JC2, GR-JC3, CG-JC4, LB1, LI3, MT3, NW5, NW6, NW7, PR3, PR4, SP3, WI3, WI4	Create a StoryMap with site info overviews	SECOG prepares / manages implementation grant applications and projects					
2024	SECOG did not advance the interim 2024 action item. We will shift it to 2025 and plan to complete it by end of year.							
L2	Advance Bike-Ped Plan Actions: Sidewalks on Route 608 (BZ3); Bike-Ped Connections to Open Space (CL3, GC2); I-95 Crossings (EL3)	<i>Defer to timing and priority order in Bike-Ped Plan</i>						
2024	SECOG staff assisted in advancing one of the open space linked local actions from the bike-ped grouping in action L2, namely, BZ3, the installation of sidewalks on Fitchville Road / Route 608 and surrounding streets. See the <i>Open Space – Transportation Crosswalk Table</i> below.							
L3	Proactively identify priority conservation targets (large tracts): BZ4, FR2, LI, NS3, PR5, SP2, S-SB4, WA4	Hold SECOG OS Dashboard trainings /working sessions with local boards and departments	Assist with grant applications and project management					
2024	SECOG did not advance the interim action item of holding a training with local boards and departments on the use of the online open space dashboard in 2024. We will continue to work toward holding a webinar in 2025 or 2026.							
L4	Proactively identify priority open space targets (neighborhood scale): GR-JC5, GC1, LE3, NL4, NL5, NW4, SP4, WI5	Hold SECOG OS Dashboard trainings / working sessions with local boards and departments	Assist with grant applications and project management					
2024	SECOG did not advance the interim action item of holding a training with local boards and departments on the use of the online open space dashboard in 2024. We will continue to work toward holding a webinar in 2025 or 2026.							

Group ID	Rec Keyword Summary & Municipal Rec IDs	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
L5	Yantic River Phosphorus Mitigation: BZ5, CL4, FR3, LB3, SA2	Coordinate with ECCD on existing conditions analysis		Consider data and sampling needs		Assist with grant applications		
2024	SECOG staff continued to build relationships with ECCD in 2024 and will offer to partner on projects and assist with phosphorus-specific issues in the Yantic River in 2025.							
L6	Re-consider Route 11 Greenway: CL1, EL1, MT1, SA1, WA1	Create a StoryMap with Route info overview	Convene stakeholder group	Pursue grants to accomplish greenway implementation				
2024	SECOG staff did not advance the interim 2024 action item. We will shift it to 2025 and plan to complete it by end of year in a potential regional trail projects database, paired with action items L7 and L8.							
L7	Rail-With-Trail Windham to Norwich: FR1, LB1, NW1, WI2	Create a StoryMap with Route info overview	Convene stakeholder group	Study feasibility	Next steps as determined by feasibility study			
2024	SECOG staff did not advance the interim 2024 action item. We will shift it to 2025 and plan to complete it by end of year in a potential regional trail projects database, paired with action items L6 and L8.							
L8	Rail-With-Trail Willimantic to Baltic: SP1, WI1	Create a StoryMap with Route info overview	Convene stakeholder group	Study feasibility	Next steps as determined by feasibility study			
2024	SECOG staff did not advance the interim 2024 action item. We will shift it to 2025 and plan to complete it by end of year in a potential regional trail projects database, paired with action items L6 and L7.							
L9	Pursue Greenway Designation: Pachaug River: GR-JC1 Quinebaug River: LI2, PR2 Oxoboxo River: MT2 Pawcatuck River: NS2, S-SB2* *(may already be underway locally)		Convene stakeholders for nomination process	Complete nominations / designations				
2024	No programmed 2024 implementation actions.							
L10	New Local Trail Routes and Open Space Area Plans: Washington Park Connections (GC3); Oak Street Cemetery (NW2); Mohegan Park Traffic Calming (NW3); Town POCD trail network (SA3); Fitchville Rail Spur (BZ2); CT-184 Multi-Use Path (GT2); Alewife Cove (NL2, WA2)	Meet with stakeholders to discuss potential next steps and SECOG's role	Assist with project implementation where possible, with assistance pathways defined per project and with local stakeholders					

Group ID	Rec Keyword Summary & Municipal Rec IDs	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
2024	SECOG staff did not provide technical assistance on these local projects in 2024. In early 2025, SECOG will create a matrix that determines which grants can support each of these projects and be ready to discuss grant applications with local towns when specific grants open to accept project proposals.							
L11	Continue Tri-Town Trail implementation: GT1, LE2	Revisit routing / Trail Master Plan	Study alternative route feasibility	Pursue implementation				
2024	SECOG staff identified the Tri-Town Trail and a candidate for potential technical assistance. However, Avalonia may be advancing this work. SECOG staff will continue to evaluate our potential role in this project.							
L12	Trolley ROW Trail: LE1, NS1, PR1, S-SB1	Create a StoryMap with Route info overview and convene stakeholder group		Study feasibility	Next steps as determined by feasibility study			
2024	No programmed 2024 implementation actions.							
L13	Eastern Shoreline Path: EL2, NL3, S-SB3, WA3	Pursue route designation		Improve facilities, provide signage and market as a USBR				
2024	No programmed 2024 implementation actions.							

Finally, as recommended in the plan, open space and transportation planning are seeking points of integration, whereby improvements to the transportation network also improve and increase open space access through sidewalk connections and cycling infrastructure that make these viable, safe routes and modes to parks. The *Open Space – Transportation Crosswalk Table* below summarizes projects from the past year that integrate these goals.

Open Space – Transportation Crosswalk Table

Open Space Plan ID or Goal / Objective #	Transportation Plan ID	Project	2024 Phase
L2 / BZ3	LOTICIP 13-1	Sidewalks on Fitchville Road / Bozrah Street Extension, and Stockhouse Road	Design
O9, O17	LOTICIP 44-1	Sidewalk on East Pattagansett Road, East Lyme, providing access to cemetery	Design
O9	LOTICIP 72-1	Lisbon River Road Interchange providing access to the Shetucket River and St. Mary’s cemetery	Design
O9	LOTICIP 94-3	Roundabout at Broad and Williams, New London, improving access to Williams Park	Design
O9, O17	LOTICIP 103-4	Road and sidewalk improvements on Norwich-New London Turnpike, improving access to Norwich Golf Course	Design

Open Space Plan ID or Goal / Objective #	Transportation Plan ID	Project	2024 Phase
O17, O19, R3	LOTICIP 113-1	Multi-Use Path on Poquetanuck Road from Middle Road to Preston Community Park, improving access to Preston Community Park, the Tri-Town Trail, and DEEP Kayak launch	Design
O17, R3	LOTICIP 71-1	Colonel Ledyard Highway Multi Use Path, increasing access to Colonel Ledyard Park and community facilities (high school, library)	Construction
O9, O17, O18	LOTICIP 94-2	Bike Lanes, sidewalks, and road improvements (Jefferson Avenue) in New London, increasing access to St. Mary’s and Cedar Grove cemeteries	Completed
G5, O17	LOTICIP 103-3	Sidewalks and bike sharrows on New London Turnpike in Norwich, providing new opportunities for active mobility	Design
L2 / CL3	LOTICIP 28-2	Sidewalk infill (Lebanon Avenue) in Colchester will provide connectivity between the Airline State Park Trail, Town Green, and nearby housing developments	Construction
G5, O17	TA NL	Williams Street New London Phase 2 Complete Street project, providing new opportunities for active mobility	Design
G5, O17, O18	TA NOR	New London Turnpike – Route 82 – Town Street sidewalk infill and bike sharrows increasing access to Lucas Park, Norwichtown Green, Uncas Leap Park	Design
G5, O17, R3	TA PRE	Hallville-Poquetanuck Rd and Lincoln Park Road Ext Multiuse Trail will construct a multiuse path and connect the Pequot Trail and the TriTown Trail.	Design
O2, O18, R3	TA WIN	Windham TA Airline Trail will improve ADA accessibility and maintain a state of good repair with one new bridge, redecking an existing pedestrian bridge and resurfacing (stonedust) to enhance ADA access.	Design

SECOG 2025 Open Space Work Program

To be updated each year in December, and posted to the SECOG website

Activities sorted by Recommendation	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
R1: Second field season of data collection in Groton, Ledyard, Montville, Windham, Lebanon, Norwich, and Salem						•	•	•	•			

Activities sorted by Recommendation	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
R2: Use first season data to pilot an open space gaps analysis approach for different transportation modes (walk, bike transit)		•	•									
R2: Use data from gaps analysis to determine subsequent projects and recommendations				•								
R2: Use second season data to conduct a gaps analysis for different transportation modes										•	•	•
R3: Create a GIS model of land ownership along priority regional multi-use path routes	•	•	•									
R3: Evaluate best grant matches for 2025 grant application cycles	•	•										
R3: Participate in Air Line State Park Trail Alliance and provide technical assistance as needed		•		•		•		•		•		•
R3: Explore opportunities for data-sharing and integration with CT Trail Finder		•								•		
R4: Continue to attend watershed group meetings in the region to understand recreation needs			•			•		•				•
R5: Development-related data lit review			•									
R6: Impaired Waterbodies Data Frame (GIS)										•	•	•
R6: Review of Existing Watershed Based Plans and Watershed Needs White Paper				•	•	•						
R6: Attendance at Watershed Based Partnership Meetings	•		•		•		•		•		•	
R7: Consider process to amend SECOG HMCAP to include High Hazard Dam Potential									•	•	•	
R8: Confirm municipal interest in a Regional Stormwater Collaborative	•											
R8: Convene quarterly Stormwater Collaborative meetings			•			•			•			•
R9: Explore the need for a regional LID bylaw review with the reconvened Stormwater Collaborative									•			
R10: Research and document food and agricultural needs as part of 2027 POCD					•	•						
R11: Create a regional heat risk story map	•	•										
R12: Complete study and selection of Yantic River flood mitigation sites as part of the multi-stakeholder Resilient CT 3.0 project												•
R12: Determine potential grant applications for flood mitigation open space acquisition					•	•						

Activities sorted by Recommendation	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
R13: Develop process for annually collecting updated open space data		•	•									
R14: Reach out to CTECO and DEEP to understand current state of vernal pool data in the state		•										
R15: Organize staff meeting around existing grants tracker, and possibilities for building in timelines that include project development periods; check in on progress			•									
R15: Update grants tracker and build out narrative-style grants deck	•	•										
L1: StoryMap for Water Access and Portages with site info overview								•				
L2: Review designs for sidewalks on Route 608 in Bozrah (timing TBD)												
L2: Determine overlaps between open space parcels and locations identified in the Safety Action Plan's Vulnerable Road User Analysis											•	•
L3 and L4: First four local trainings on SECOG OS dashboard				•	•	•	•					
L5: Partner with ECCD as needed on phosphorus-specific issues in the Yantic River						•						
L6: Route 11 Greenway Data Review StoryMap					•							
L7: Windham to Norwich Rail with Trail overview StoryMap						•						
L8: Windham to Baltic Rail with Trail overview StoryMap							•					
L10: Meet with three communities on local trail routes and open space plans (GC3, NW2, NW3, SA3, BZ2. CL1)			•		•				•			
L11: Coordinate with Town and City of Groton and GU to determine if there is a viable route identified within the TriTown Master Plan. If not, advance a PEL study (NEPA + planning) to ensure that the solution is context sensitive and feasible.							•					
L14: Identify opportunities for urban park development/improvements and associated funding sources (ORLP) for qualifying towns (NW4, NL5, MT6, CL2, GRJC5, GC1, GT3, CE3)	•	•	•									